



## MASTER FILE

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DSSD CENSUS 2000 PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONS MEMORANDUM SERIES #DD-6

MEMORANDUM FOR Michael J. Longini  
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Subject: Observation of Coverage Edit Follow-Up in Tulsa, Oklahoma on  
May 17, 2000

On Wednesday, May 17, 2000, I visited the TCIM Telephone Center. I listened in while agents made telephone calls, watched as Quality Assurance Representatives (QARs) conducted quality checks on agents, saw one remote monitoring session, and sat in on a calibration session of the QARs.

The manager gave me a tour of the telephone center. Downstairs was the quality assurance staff in shared cubicles. Upstairs was the training room, meeting rooms, and telephones. There were three spines of computers dedicated to the census and one dialer. There were also other non-census activities going on from the three other dialers in the large room. This caused some disruption when another workstation reached a milestone and conducted a pep rally. The Coverage Edit Followup staff included one Quality Assurance Supervisor (QAS), 38 QARs, four to five Telephone Supervisors, and 55 Telephone Agents. The Center had mostly telephones and a few headsets at the stations. It looked like there were about 40 stations and anywhere from one-half to capacity were being used while I was there. There were no clocks on any of the walls. The quality assurance staff had the ability to monitor one interview session at a time remotely.

I asked the manager what problems he came across, and he mentioned the following:

- Early on, there had been cases where no name popped up when the agent was supposed to verify reaching the correct household.
- The introductory screen would freeze up during call backs, so the instrument had to be closed when starting the interview. This caused some dead space that the interviewer would fill by asking how the respondent was at the beginning of the interview.

- Switching to the Spanish language did not work. It would freeze in the middle. The agents were told not to use the Spanish script.
- Two monitoring software screens would pop up, so they limited the remote monitoring to one at a time.

The agents said they enjoyed the work but that the script could get tiresome. Some had worked on the inbound calls and then worked on other Telephone Center operations while waiting for the outbound calls to begin. They said respondents were more cooperative answering census questions than when they had done marketing calls. I will discuss hang-ups, verbatim script reading, data entry, and Spanish language interviews,

I heard a couple of telephone calls where the correct household was not reached and one where the person hung up right away. A one-person household hung up in the middle of the interview when he got angry about the repeated questions geared to trying to remove persons from the roster. I heard another person hang up on an agent who was difficult to understand because she spoke English as a second language.

The agents knew they were graded for following the script verbatim, and each person I heard kept close to the script. One person replaced the word “household” with “resident.” Several agents did not read the final paragraph of examples of children missed “foster, newborn...” One person read all of the fields on the roster: first name, last name, middle initial, age, and relationship. Most people read just the names.

The keyboard entries became lowercase or all capital letters depending on how the data entry was done. Some agents asked how to spell names, some didn’t. For the American Indian entry, I saw one agent put in two tribes “Creek/Seminole.” The distinction between the relationship of roommate vs. roomer/boarder was not available in the instrument. The words and concepts are very close. The agent, after reading all of the categories, ended up prompting the person with “roommate?” and the respondent agreed. Mexican respondents had difficulty answering the race question. Agents got into the pattern of directing the respondent towards the “other race” category and typing in “Mexican” or “Mexican American” in the fill-in screen.

Several agents spoke Spanish and were able to translate the questions on the fly and conduct the interview in Spanish. Those who did not speak Spanish would reschedule the interview. The calls were supposed to be all English cases, but many of the households were Spanish speaking. One person we reached had a hard time spelling in English. The agent lamented that she could only ask the questions of the first two people on the roster and that persons had to be 18 or older—since English speakers in the household might be the children. One agent asked a respondent if there were an English-speaking child who could get on the other telephone. The respondent said there was only one telephone.

The QARs I observed did a good job, and their job was important in maintaining the quality of the work. One of them went downstairs to complete the form before reviewing it with the agent, so the agent did not get immediate feedback. Another did not get to the agent before another incoming call came in. The third QAR was able to give feedback right away. The QARs biggest complaint was that the 22-digit case identification number that they needed to transcribe was too small and disappeared from the screen quickly. The review was not done for Spanish calls, and one QAR had to wait awhile for the person to get a call that could be reviewed. The remote observation had the questions come up on the screen, and we listened to the agent on the speaker phone. It was graded just like the ones done in person. The only other problem was that there were too many QARs scheduled to be there that day and not enough the day before. The QAS was working on correcting this problem.

The incoming call for the agent that interrupted her getting immediate feedback on her monitoring session turned out to be an exception case. The respondent told her that her son, whom she supported, was out of the country doing missionary work. The agent looked up college students. She still was not sure whether to include the missionary on the roster because of the fact that the respondent said that the person was being supported by the household. The agent asked her supervisor. He asked her to find out if the person lived there on April 1, 2000. The respondent said that the missionary was away from October 1998-October 2000. The missionary was taken off the roster.

I also observed a calibration session. This was conducted by the QAS to make sure the QARs were grading the agents consistently. This was the first week of calibration sessions, and the meetings needed to be tightened up. Several people came late, forgot pencils, sweaters and went to retrieve them, and the QAS had not made enough copies of the grading sheet. By the time the people returned and more copies of the form had been made, another group kicked us out of the meeting room. While waiting for the meeting room, this group had been standing beside the census work area, which compromised the confidentiality of the census work.

We finally got situated in another meeting room, but still had a hard time getting to hear an interview. A QAR suggested listening to the end of one interview to catch the beginning of the next. We did that and were able to listen to an interview. The QAS made comments during the interview that the person was not reading the script verbatim and that a person was taken off the roster incorrectly when it was stated he had been there a month. This influenced how the QARs completed their evaluation. The QAS stated if a person was there on April 1 then they should be counted. A QAR thought that the agent should have probed to find out where they spent most of the time. The QARs were led to believe that where the respondent was on April 1 was the deciding factor.

### **Recommendations for the CEFU**

- Telephone Centers should have headsets.
- Make the 22-digit case identification number bigger, so the QARs can transcribe it easier.
- Increase the remote-monitoring capability.
- Add missionaries to the residence rules look-up table.
- Keep non-census employees out of the census area. This could be done by clearly identifying those working on the census and alerting supervisors monitoring the work area to this concern.
- Since the calls are done over a month after April 1, 2000, special emphasis should be given in training about what to do about in-movers and out-movers.

cc:

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